

Translocality, Texts and Discourses: Ritual transformations of Islamic sacrifices

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Islamic texts prescribe only two sacrificial rituals that, despite their pre-Islamic roots, achieved the status of prophetic practice and subsequently gained wide acceptance in the Muslim world: the *'aqiqa* (hereafter referred to as *akika* according to Swahili orthography) and the *'udhiya*. Most Muslim societies primarily acknowledge the *akika* as a birth ritual. Seven days after the birth of a baby the parents or grandparents kill one or two sheep or goats. Ritual textbooks recommend that, alongside this sacrifice, the child receives its name and undergoes a complete haircut. The majority of Islamic legal handbooks describe the *akika* in the same chapter as the second “orthodox” sacrifice: the *'udhiya*. The latter animal sacrifice is performed all over the world during the Hajj season when the annual pilgrimage to Mecca is scheduled. The whole festival is called the Feast of Sacrifice (*'id al-adha*; hereafter referred to as *Idd el-Hajj* according to Swahili orthography). Apart from the ritual killing of an animal which lends its name to the ceremony, the other two major elements are a congregational prayer and a sermon.¹

As anthropologists of Islam have amply shown, Islamic ritual is neither completely defined by translocal scriptures nor fully the result of local cultural foci.² Both local forces and translocal factors usually associated with globalization (such as the emergence of a global Muslim diaspora), have equally influenced practice and

¹ Pierre Bonte, Anne-marie Brisebarre and Altan Gokalp, eds. *Sacrifices en islam: espaces et temps d'un rituel*.

² John R. Bowen “On scriptural essentialism and ritual variation: Muslim sacrifice in Sumatra and Morocco,” 656–71.

significance of “canonical” rituals like the Feast of Sacrifice.³ These changes again fuel local and translocal debates in which continuation or change of ritual practices is legitimized or attacked by reference to the two basic scriptural authoritative corpuses: the Qur’an and prophetic traditions (sg. *hadîth*, pl. *ahâdîth*) collectively known as “the Book and the Sunna.”

While this process is certainly not novel, its scale and pervasiveness has accelerated over the last century. What happened in a particular context is no longer defined only by actors in that specific space, but is increasingly influenced by translocal actors. The resulting state of tension is often referred to as translocality. Following von Oppen, I understand translocality as the “tension interactive entre le mouvement et l’aménagement qui se développe à partir des processus de transformations sociales et culturelles.”⁴ Peter Mandaville⁵ indicates five different transformative forces behind these socio-cultural transformations that lead to this state of translocality: the movement of peoples, the emergence of transnational social movements, experiments with supranational political forms, the rise of global cities and developments in travel and communications. Especially the last driver, developments in media and communication practices, has apparently fuelled many of the debates on correct Islamic ritual praxis.

In this contribution I will specially look at Islamic texts and their interpreters as carriers, as vectors of translocality. What is the influence of these texts, originated in a different time and place, on current ritual practice in a particular local context? How do people connect to other translocalities such as the global Muslim Umma, in

³ Anne-Marie Brisebarre, *La fête du mouton: un sacrifice musulman dans l'espace urbain* (Paris: CNRS, 1998).

⁴ Achim von Oppen, “L'évolution d'un programme de recherche: la «translocalité» au Centre de Recherche sur l'Orient Moderne (ZMO), Berlin,” in Laurence Marfaing and Steffen Wippel (eds), *Les relations transsahariennes à l'époque contemporaine: un espace en constante mutation* (Paris: Karthala, 2003), 410.

⁵ Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim politics: reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), 15–19.

both its contemporary form, as symbolized in the Hajj rituals, and in its original state, the first community guided by Mohammed and located in specific localities like Mecca and Medina? And how is scriptural authority as represented by disembodied texts mediated by the bodily experiences of local human beings?⁶

The Islamic sacrificial rituals *akika* and *Idd el-Hajj*) have much in common and can therefore be fruitfully compared. The translocal roots are clearly present in both rituals: probably every Muslim in Tanzania is aware that neither ritual has local origins, but are “imported.” Even if the local performance of the sacrifices does not fully conform to every detail of a universal legal Islamic text, that is not to say that the rituals are “traditional”;⁷ both are sanctioned by Qur’an reciting and the presence of Muslim religious experts. From a legal perspective both rituals share a similar status: prophetic, commendable *sunna*. Also the meaning and significance of the major element in both rituals (the animal sacrifice), are equivalent, according to most texts: imitation of the Muslim prophets, thanksgiving and a means of becoming closer to God.

However, when we zoom in on the performance and the debates about the rituals, we see that the effects of translocal influences in both rituals are very uneven. In the case of the *akika* we see a remarkable resilience of the ritual as a funerary practice (rather than as a birth ritual) and very little change in practice over a period

⁶ The ethnographic data underpinning this contribution was collected during fieldwork in the coastal town of Tanga in Tanzania in the period 2000–2002. Gerard C. Van de Bruinhorst, “*Raise your Voices and Kill your Animals*”; Gerard C. Van de Bruinhorst, “*Siku ya Arafa and the Idd el-Hajj: Knowledge, Ritual and Renewal in Tanzania*,” 127–50. On the link between religious authoritative texts and physical experience, see Gerard C. Van de Bruinhorst, “*‘I Didn’t Want to Write This’: The Social Embeddedness of Translating Moonsighting Verses of the Quran into Swahili*,” 38–74.

⁷ I once made the mistake of asking about the “customary *akika*” when I meant the *akika* performed after the death of a child. I was quickly corrected by Muslim interlocutors who pointed out that this was still Islamic, and certainly not part of Swahili *mila* (“custom” opposed to *dini* “religion”). Someone else commented that the “new” practice of the *akika* as a birth ritual was actually much more unislamic because it involved the use of music, the intermingling of the sexes and drumming. According to this person, *akika* was a religious funerary rite because it focused on prayers.

of more than three decades. The importance of kinship networks and local communities seems to remain a constant factor in this lifecycle event. After a short but fierce discussion as part of the ideological battle against ritual innovation (*bid'a*) in the 1970s and 1980s, the *akika* seems to disappear from the radar. In the case of the Idd el-Hajj we see a very clear change from local practice when the reformist group Ansaar Muslim Youth Center (AMYC) started to perform the Idd el-Hajj sacrifice at a public prayer field thus making it much more visible. The second change AMYC implemented was probably even more dramatic: by following a different calendar they politicized the ritual, running against the Idd el-Hajj as a national holiday in Tanzania. Both spatial and temporal changes emphasized how Tanga Muslims were part of the wider global Muslim community: suddenly a local ritual became much more translocal in character and outlook.

In this chapter I will argue that this opposition between a “local” *akika* ritual and a “translocal” Idd el-Hajj is not very helpful in the analysis. Rather, we will see that critical in the discursive process in which correct Islamic practice is construed, is how key players in these debates relate local and contemporary behavior to the past. Whilst most Muslims will agree that the Qur'an is the highest textual authority and Muhammad is the finest example of proper ritual behavior based on the Qur'an, they also agree that access to these two translocal sources is mediated through texts. And the question of who is allowed to read, translate and explain these texts depends on changing views of local religious authority. Neither the interpretation of texts nor the performance of animal sacrifice in these two Islamic rituals are disembodied activities; on the contrary they are strongly influenced by personal experience and embodied knowledge.

Akika: birth or funeral ritual

Texts

The Swahili word *akika* is derived from the Arabic *‘aqîqa*. One of the *ahâdîth* often quoted to illustrate the textual legitimacy of the ritual:

Samura reported the Prophet to have said, "Every (recently born) boy is pledged with *‘aqîqa*. Slaughter the animal on his behalf on the seventh day (after his birth), shave his head and give him his name."⁸

The ritual has pre-Islamic roots. One of the *ahâdîth* that made its way in the authoritative collections refers to this period of ignorance (*Jâhilîya*):

I heard my father Burayda say: We used to kill a sheep when a son (*ghulâm*) was born in the Jâhilîya and dye his head with blood, but when God came with the Islam we started to sacrifice a sheep and dye his head with saffron.⁹

The Tanzanian *madrasa* (Qur'an school) literature on the subject outlines the ritual in conformity to the texts quoted above: seven days after the birth of a child the parents should name the boy or girl, slaughter one sheep (when the baby is a girl) or two sheep (in case of a boy) and shave the child's hair. The sacrificial meat should be given to the poor. Some sources also indicate that the equivalent weight of the shaven hair should be donated to the needy in silver or gold. Most of the Swahili educational material devote a few lines to the ritual and repeat these advices in more or less the same words. If the *akika* is not performed after a week, it can be done on

⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tuhfat al-mawdud bi-ahkam al-mawlud*; Dawud, Maryam Ibrahim Hindi Dawud, *Al-‘aqîqa fi al-fiqh al-Islami*; F. Aubaile-Sallenave, "Les rituels de naissance dans le monde musulman," in Pierre Bonte, Anne-Marie Brisebarre and Altan Gokalp (eds.), *Sacrifices en Islam: Espaces et temps d'un rituel*, 125–60.

⁹ Ibid.

the fourteenth, the twenty-first of after any seven-day cycle until the child reaches puberty.¹⁰

The *akika*, according to the Islamic texts, is a symbol of thanksgiving and expressing joy, as well as being a ransom (*fikak, rahn*) for the child. Elaborating on this latter aspect, several authors emphasize that the immature, innocent child whose *akika* has been sacrificed will be able to intercede for its parents on the Day of Resurrection,¹¹ hence the often posed question of parents about what they should do if their child dies before its *akika* has been performed. Most Saudi-educated Muslim authors agree that, in such circumstances the ritual is rendered useless and should not be carried out at all. However, one of the five established schools of Islamic law, the Shafi‘i *madhhab*, allows for an *akika* practice after the death of a child. Not surprisingly this is also the school of law that emphasizes the child’s potential for *shafa‘a* (Swahili: *shufaa*, intercession). Two prominent representatives of the Shafi‘i *madhhab* who defend this idea of a deceased child as heavenly intercessor are al-Suyuti (ca. 1445–1505) and al-Ghazzali (ca. 1058-1111).¹² It is probably this translocal connection with the Shafi‘i school of law, which has dominated Islamic thinking and

¹⁰ A basic *madrassa* text dealing with the ritual, produced and widely used in Tanga is *Masa’il muntakhiba* (vol. 1), 21–22. Some examples of Swahili sources include Muhammad Masoud Hilal al Barwani, *Adabu za Muislamu kwa watoto wake*, 135–41; “Maswali na Majibu ya Kiislam,” *Maarifa*, February 15, 2002, 6.

¹¹ Most Muslims maintain that before a child is incapable of any sin prior to puberty. See the account of Muhammad’s deceased son Ibrahim: “huyu (Ibrahim) ni mtoto wako na bado hajabaleghe, na wala hajaandikiwa madhambi’ (Jumuiya Zawiyatul Qadiriya Tanzania, “Mjadala baina ya jamaat Answaru Sunna na Ahal-Sunna wal-Jamaa wakiwakilishwa na vijana wa Qadiriya” 211.

¹² Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Suyuti, *Nuzhat al-muta’ammil wa murshid al-muta’ahhil fi’l khatib wa al-mutazawwij*; Ghazali’s classic work *Revival of Religious Sciences* deals with this issue in the chapter on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage. A Swahili booklet mentioning *shufaa* is Abdallah Bawazir, *Haki za mtoto mchanga katika uislam* (Dar es Salaam), 1: “Mtoto ambaye hakuchinjwa *akika*, hapewi nafasi ya kuwaombea (*Shufaa*) wazazi wake siku ya kiama.”

ritual praxis for many centuries in East Africa, that has influenced the form and meaning of the akika as a funerary practice rather than a birth ritual.¹³

Bodies and places

Whereas the texts can only explain minor differences in the practice of the akika, ethnographic observations all over the world show the ritual's remarkable flexibility to adapt to local circumstances.¹⁴ In Tanga (where I conducted fieldwork in 2000–2002) most informants who had performed an akika, said that they did so after death and not after the birth of their (grand)child.¹⁵ Whenever a child dies at a tender age the father or grandfather spends the money he gets on this occasion¹⁶ on the purchase of a sheep. Sometime after the child's burial (some mention the fortieth day as auspicious) the animal's throat is cut, and the blood drained into a hole in front of the house. Before the actual slaying, prayers are said and incense is burned. The fat tail (*mkia*) together with the liver (*maini*), coffee berries (*buni*) and corn (*bisi*) are roasted and mixed with honey (*asali*) or something sweet like raisins or grapes (*zabibu*); sometimes the sternum (*kidari*) is also mentioned as an ingredient. The mixture is served with rice bread (*mkate wa mchele*) and the two bereaved parents feed each other inside the house. Finally the unbroken bones are wrapped in a white

¹³ For another East African account of the akika as a funerary ceremony see Abdul Hamid El-Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town*. Two other major Shafi'i centres of learning where the akika is practiced after the death of a young child are nineteenth-century Mecca and Indonesia. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka* vol. 2, 136–43; John R. Bowen, "On Scriptural Essentialism," 662.

¹⁴ D. Bramon, "El rito de las fadas, pervivencia de la ceremonia pre-islámica dela 'aqiqa'," in Abdeljelil Temimi (ed.), *Las practicas musulmanas de los moriscos andaluces, 1492–1609: actas del III Simposio Internacional de Estudios Moriscos*.

¹⁵ Information in this paragraph is based on 50 interviews with elderly Digo men in January and February 2002, supplemented by the description of a child's funeral in Kigombe, a village a few kilometres south of Tanga; Pamela Weaver Landberg, *Kinship and Community in a Tanzanian Coastal Village (East Africa)*, 385–91.

¹⁶ Some interlocutors say they performed the akika after death instead of after birth because the former was the only occasion when they received substantial financial gifts which enabled them to conduct the ritual.

linen cloth (*bafta* or *kitambara*) or in the animal's skin and buried in the same hole containing the sheep's blood. The hole is then covered with a heavy stone, right in front of the porch, in order "to keep the memory of the dead child alive."

The spatial structure of the *akika* as it is practiced in Tanga can best be understood as a dual movement, a traveling between different localities, in which the child and the sacrificial animal are the most important means of transformation. The parents return from their nocturnal vigil (*mkesha*) and are only allowed to resume normal sexual relations after the performance. The ritual ends the liminal period of mourning (*matanga*) in which many things are reversed (men cook instead of women for example).¹⁷ Through the medium of the animal they now return from liminality and death to life. The child goes from life through the ritual towards paradise. The sheep is used as the medium, and is finally resurrected as a horse (*farasi*) on the Day of Judgement.¹⁸ The physical, nourishing elements of the sheep remain with the living parents while the spiritual character (the sheep as carrier of the child's soul) serves the child.

All the sheep's vital organs return to the place where the child comes from: the father and mother's body. One of the descent units based on common maternal origin is called *tumbo*, the same word for internal organs. So the literal *tumbo* of the sheep returns to the social *tumbo* of the deceased child. This may explain why the *akika* is held in different places (and not always at the child's house): it actually defines the kinship ties, as vividly described by Landberg). The same movement is visible at the burial places: the sheep is killed and its bones and blood buried in front

¹⁷ The religious part of the child's funeral is now strictly the men's burden and they bury the Muslim child in the same cemetery as adults, but in the past women had a lot more agency in this ritual and buried the child inside the house. In 1945 Kenya witnessed riots on this particular issue; Robert Louis Bunger, *Islamization among the Upper Pokomo*, 110–11. Also Van Pelt mentions the common burial place for young children inside the house; P. van Pelt *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, 232.

¹⁸ Or a camel as Landberg heard; Landberg, *Kinship*, 385. In other Islamic societies it is not the *akika* animal but the Idd el-Hajj victim that is attributed psychopompos characteristics. In Mombasa the cow slaughtered at the funeral of an adult Muslim will change into a horse on reaching paradise ("Fatawa," *Sauti ya Haki*, February 1974, 6).

of the house whereas the baby used to be buried at the back of the house, which is perceived as the “wild,” uncivilized side. (Nowadays when children are buried in the communal cemetery, the sacrificial remains are either buried before the front porch of the house or near the child’s grave.) The killing of the animal and cooking of the meat takes place in front of the house and is done by men only. The father brings the first morsels to the secluded wife and that marks the resumption of their sexual activity.

As this analysis illustrates, the concept of place and the spatial context is constitutive in the meaning of the ritual. Not only literal place, for example where to bury the child or the animal remains, but also social space such as the role of kinship and community members. As Landberg shows, the fact that someone is a “stranger,” for example an upcountry labour migrant, significantly changes the akika ritual. Not only the name, but many other ritual elements and meanings of the akika are influenced by translocal, Islamic textual traditions such as the notion of shufaa (potential to intercede). At the same time the ritual is rooted and embedded in a locally defined semantic system which makes it very resilient to change. Any change in ritual elements to align them with the translocal Islamic texts, will substantially change the meaning of akika.

To give one example, we will look at the species of the sacrificial animal in relation to the gender of the child. Of the sample of 36 cases discussed here, only seven girls (against 29 boys) had an akika performed when they died. This can only partly be explained by the fact that a girl’s childhood is shorter than a boy’s. Girls are said to reach puberty earlier than boys, and if they die after puberty they will be given a normal adult funeral. One Digo shaykh stated that deceased boys up to the age of 12 years received an akika funeral, while girls counted as children only up to the age of six.¹⁹ Another, probably more plausible, reason why girls do not get an

¹⁹ Interview, Shia shaykh, Mabokweni, January 10, 2001. Most people agree that the age of the child must be below puberty, but some say that even after four years of age the akika should not be performed (Interview, Mzee Bisani, Tanga, January 1, 2001).

akika as often as boys do, might be that women are not seen as being suited to the role of religious mediator (one of most important meanings attributed to the funeral ritual).²⁰

In the majority of cases the animal sacrifice for a funeral akika was a sheep. Of 36 Digo men who had all performed at least one akika (but most of them more), 20 had sacrificed a sheep and 16 a goat during their last ritual. Taking the previously mentioned 29 dead boys into consideration, 14 sheep and 15 goats were sacrificed for them (only one of the aforementioned seven girls had a goat sacrifice). Given the fact that most people do not like mutton and, the sacrifice of sheep is rarer than goats, and also that the majority of Idd el-Hajj sacrifices involve goats, it is clear that sheep are overrepresented here.

By contrast, most contemporary Swahili Islamic written sources that discuss the akika ritual mention that goats should (also) be sacrificed, instead of sheep.²¹ The men I interviewed indicate that due to increasing Islamic knowledge, the number of goats sacrificed as akika animals is rising. In the past, Digo men emphatically state that every akika performed after the death of a minor child used to involve the sacrifice of a sheep (and this is confirmed by other ethnographies of the region).²² However, many men remarked that nowadays it not matter anymore: you can also sacrifice a goat.

This changing preference from sheep to goat is accompanied by a change in perception of the ritual's efficacy. In talking about the effect of the ritual, a pattern emerged that informants who downplayed the ritual mechanism of the akika usually

²⁰ Gerard C. van de Bruinhorst, *"Raise your Voices,"* 156. This is what El-Zein explicitly states; Abdul Hamid El-Zein, *The Sacred Meadows*, 253. Landberg, *Kinship*, 386 also witnessed a boy's akika, but does not draw any conclusions about gendered meanings of the ritual.

²¹ See the internet article "Aqiqiyah ni mbuzi" (the akika is a goat) at www.al-iman.co.uk/fatima_ra.htm (accessed 15 September 2005). In the *madrasa* textbook (*Hii ni tafsiri ya hidayatu-l atfal*, 128) the Arabic word *shah* (sheep) is translated by the neutral Swahili word *mnyama* (animal); probably an attempt to "correct" the customary akika funeral rite which is associated with sheep.

²² Landberg, *Kinship*, 385, 389.

favoring goats, while others who believed the sacrifice really “did something” preferred sheep. There was no difference between those rituals carried out after birth and those carried out after death in this respect. When informants stressed that the ritual should be done while the baby was alive and attributed another more than purely ethical function to the sacrifice (expression of joy, thanksgiving, piety, charity), they emphasized that the animal should be a sheep.²³ In both the birth and funeral versions of the ritual a strong identification between sheep and child was established while the identification between goats and children was much weaker. The identification between sheep and child was constructed by rubbing the living baby (in case of the birth ritual) with some of the sheep’s gravy, or whispering the child’s name in the sheep’s ear (in case of both a birth and a funeral ritual). Identification between the dead child and the sheep was established by the same white funeral shrouds in which the bodies were buried, or by choosing the same burial spot. The careful treatment of the bones in the birth and funeral *akika* was explained in two different ways: the intact bones protected the living child whenever an accident occurred. The untouched bones in the funeral ritual signified the idea that the animal would be resurrected and reassembled on the Day of Judgement. When only the ethical effect of the ritual was stressed, usually people chose a goat. In that case, the ritual details (e.g. sweet and bitter ingredients) were left out.

Unlike goats and cattle, the main sources of meat in Tanzania, sheep occupy an ambiguous position within most sacrificial systems along the East African coast. Black sheep are used in rainmaking rituals²⁴ and play a role in purification

²³ A good example is Mzee Bisani, who explained that the *akika* after death was ineffectual and simply a *sadaka* (gift, charity) and therefore you should take a goat. When you performed an *akika* after birth the ritual was effective (it really protects the child during his or her life), therefore the preferred animal was a sheep. The ritual became efficacious when the child drank some of the sheep’s gravy (*supu*) (interview, Tanga, January 1, 2001).

²⁴ Such as the one performed on September 19, 1986 in Same; “Same tusilimu upya,” *an-Nuur* 173, October 30, 1998.

ceremonies to cleanse a homestead after homicide or incest.²⁵ Several authors note the anomalous function of sheep in East African folk tales and rituals, making them ideal mediators between binary oppositions, such as life/death, male/female, domestic place and wild space, etc.²⁶ Thus, we find special taboos for the eating of mutton and not for goat meat.²⁷ Changing the ritual from sheep into a goat implies a loss of all these (from a reformist perspective) unwanted (and from the perspective of many other Muslims very much valued) connotations of intercession and intermediation.²⁸ This is not something peculiar to the environment of Tanga, but is part of a much larger debate about funerary practices as sites of ideological struggle between “traditionalists” and “reformists.” As Becker²⁹ has pointed out, these debates are influenced both by very space-specific factors and transregional effects, and are therefore a good illustration of translocality, as we will see in the next section.

Localizing scriptural authority

²⁵ David Parkin, *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual among the Giriama of Kenya*, 146–51.

²⁶ Jan de Wolf, “De Betekenis van het Schaap in Enkele Oost-Afrikaanse Verhalen en Riten,” 96–112. David Parkin (Ibid.) mentions that, among the Masai, sheep are seen as more feminine than goats. Both authors mention a special relationship between the sheep and the hyena (*fisi*); In Tanga sometimes the word *nyang’au* (hyena) is used for the wild counterpart of the sheep. In Lamu sheep are symbolically linked to the wild gazelle Abdul Hamid El-Zein, *The Sacred Meadows*, 291.

²⁷ Jan de Wolf, “De betekenis.” J.W.T. Allen, *The Customs of the Swahili People: The Desturi za Waswahili of Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari and other Swahili Persons*, 100. Parkin, *Sacred Void*.

²⁸ The notion of intercession as an important benefit of the akika ritual is usually obscured in modern Islamic works. For example Dawud (*al-‘aqiqa*, 40–41) quotes in her thesis a medieval source about the meaning of the akika but omits the sentence on the intercession. Why Muslims might object against something or someone interceding between God and human beings is best explained in the discussions about saints (see for example Jumuiya Zawiyatul Qadiriya Tanzania, “Mjadala,” 235–47). See also the radio lectures by professor Malik on the subject of Shufaa: Muhammad Husain Malik, *Shafa’a ilivyo katika uislam*.

²⁹ Felicitas Becker, “Islamic Reform and Historical Change in the Care of the Dead: Conflicts over Funerary Practice among Tanzanian Muslims,” 416–34.

Nowadays most reformists dealing with funerary rituals ignore the widespread coastal custom of the *akika* after the death of immature children. But during earlier attempts to purify East African Islam of local “corruptions,” Muslim religious scholars explicitly addressed the proper time of the *akika*. Both al-Amin Mazrui (1891–1947) and his student Abdallah Saleh Farsy (1912–1982), arguably two of the most well-known East African reformers, explicitly condemned the practice of *akika* as a funeral rite for deceased children. In the 1933 Arabic edition of his textbook *Hidayat al-atfal*, al-Amin Mazrui added a footnote in which he refers to this local “aberration” on the Swahili coast:

It is not according to the Prophet’s practice (*sunna*) what some people do when they delay the *akika* and perform it after death. And some collect the bones and keep them for days and that is not how it must be done. But throw the bones of the *akika* away, just like all other waste of animal sacrifices (*dhaba’ih*), there is no difference.³⁰

Al-Amin’s student Abdallah Saleh Farsy’s Swahili Qur’an translation (first published in one volume in 1969) mentions the local *akika* for dead children as one of 11 bad practices in “our countries” (*nchi zetu*):³¹ “[t]he practice of the *akika* is endorsed by the prophet’s example as a birth rite not as a funeral rite.” Farsy’s reformist ideas on local rituals were elaborated in more detail in his two-volume book *Bid-a*, first published in 1977. In these books he devotes a few lines to how to perform the *akika* ritual in the chapter “Kufanyiwa *akika*”:

³⁰ In the Arabic edition in my collection, p. 60, which looks like a photographic reprint. It is possible that in the first original Arabic editions (most likely printed in 1933) the footnote was not yet there. It is noteworthy that in the most recent Swahili editions in my possession (handwritten Swahili in Arabic script: “Hii ni tafsiri ya hidayatu-l atfal” (Tanga: Madrasa Shamsiyya) and another translation in Swahili in Latin script “Tafsiri ya hidayatul atfal,” translated by Kheri bin Shahib (Mombasa: Adam Traders) this footnote is omitted.

³¹ In his explanatory footnote attached to Qur’an 6: 141 “But waste not by excess: for Allah loveth not the wasters” (translation by Yusuf Ali). Some of the other corruptions leading to money squandering are initiation rites, marrying a second wife, spirit possession rituals, funeral rituals such as *khitma* and *tahlili*, excessive maulid readings, grave visits (*ziyarat*), going on Hajj more than once and *karamu* (ritual meals for social occasions).

The Messenger urged to perform the akika (sacrificing a goat) quickly after a child was born to add to the pleasure of giving birth. He did not say that when the child died it [i.e. the akika] should be slaughtered for him/her nor to do the things that people do [here]. How people know to mess religious things up! They will be hanged upside down in the fire on the [day of] Resurrection. A great punishment and a great disgrace!³²

In Farsy's opinion, everything not practiced or explicitly endorsed by Prophet Muhammad should not be allowed.³³ In two semi-biographical works on Muhammad's grandsons, Hassan and Husayn (the only two for whom Muhammad performed an akika),³⁴ Farsy included more than a full page on the practice of the akika.³⁵ He starts by establishing the Qur'anic roots of the practice: Ibrahim's joy at having received his two sons.³⁶ Just like Ibrahim and, in later times, the prophet Zakariyya who also received a "pure progeny" (Q3:38) today the akika is, according to the reformist Farsy, just an expression of the willingness to follow the "millat abikum" (religion of your fathers).³⁷ It is the reenactment of these archetypal rituals, rather than a particular efficacy that is important in the performance of the akika. Therefore he downplays the significance of a salient detail like the prohibition of breaking the bones of the sacrificial animal. According to Farsy, breaking the bones might signify the breaking of strong-willed children whereas others may preserve the bones intact lest no harm may fall upon the child during his or her life. The author does not mention any possibility for the child to intercede between God

³² Mtume kahimiza ifanywe akika (kuchinjwa mbuzi) akizaliwa mtoto kwa ajili ya kufurahikia neema ya kuzaa. Hakusema kuwa akifa mtoto ndio achinjiwe na kufanya hayo wanayoyafanya. Ama watu wamejua kuyakoroga mambo ya dini chini juu! Nao watatundikwa Motoni Kiyama kichwa chini miguu juu. Adhabu kuu na hizaya kuu! Abdallah Saleh Farsy, "Bid-a" (second print, 1979, part one), 27.

³³ Mohamed S. Mraja, "The Reform Ideas of Shaykh ʿAbdallah Salih al Farsi and the Transformation of Marital Practices Among Digo Muslims of Kenya," 245–78.

³⁴ Sa'id bin Muhammad Ba ʿIshan, *Bushra al-karim bi-sharh masa'il al-ta'lim 'ala muqaddimat al-hadramiyya*, 130; Mzee bin Ali Muhammad, *Umuri swalat al-kubra* (ca. 1968), 61.

³⁵ Abdallah Saleh Farsy, *Maisha ya sayyidnal Hassan*, 5–7.

³⁶ Q14:39; "Praise be to Allah, Who hath granted unto me in old age Isma'il and Isaac."

³⁷ The sacrifice during the Hajj as an imitation of Ibrahim's near-sacrifice of his son is linked to the sacrifice of the akika in Musa Ibrahim Menk, *Social Conduct of a Muslim*. The quote was shown to me during fieldwork in Tanga in 2002.

and his parents. Finally, Farsy addresses those who practice the akika after the child's death:

The akika should be done when the child is alive, not when it is dead. This [wrong practice] is done by those who advocate [similar religious innovations like] khitima, tahlil, elaborate mourning rituals after 40 days and hauli get-togethers.³⁸

Like all Islamic rituals, the akika should be done in accordance to Muhammad's (written) explanations and practical examples: "hivyo ndivo [sic] alivyosema mtume na ndivyo alivyofanya" (this is the way the Prophet has said it and so he has done it).

In 1980 or 1981 the head of the Yashrutiyya Sufi branch, Nurudin Shadhili, responded to Farsy's Bid-a pamphlets in his book *Ufafanuzi wa bid-a* (The Explanation of Religious Innovation). Like many other Islamic scholars, Sheikh Nurudin travelled extensively in his pursuit of knowledge and as part of his work for the Muslim Hajj Trust and his commercial activities.³⁹ He was born in the south of Tanzania, in Kilwa Kisiwani in the region of Lindi. In 1965 he was imprisoned under the reign of Nyerere. From 1965 to 1980 he lived in Tanga because he was not allowed to return to the Lindi area. During this time he nurtured close friendships with local Tanga religious scholars. In 1980 he moved again to Dar es Salaam where he died in 2007. During his life he spent shorter periods in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In his 40 page booklet *Ufafanuzi*, he refutes all the points made by Farsy, including his condemnation of the akika after the child's death. After a general description of the (preferred) akika when the child is alive (performed after seven days, the killing of sheep or goat in similar conditions to the 'udhiya sacrifice, the

³⁸ Farsy, "Maisha ya sayyidnal Hassan," 6. All of the mentioned rituals are critically discussed in his books on *bid'a*.

³⁹ Most of the biographical information in this paragraph is derived from Chanfi Ahmed, *Les conversions à l'Islam fondamentaliste en Afrique au sud du Sahara: Le cas de la Tanzanie et du Kenya*, 64–69.

bones of the animal must be left undamaged, the meat cooked with some sweet ingredients and just the skin donated as charity) Nurudin concludes:

If the akika is not performed when the child is alive, even when it dies at a young age it is also allowed to catch up (*kutadarak*) after its death. See these things in Hajatu-Insan p. 151 by al-Alim ali bin Hemed na bushra L-Karym p. 116 vol. 2.

The two sources he mentions are both important Shafi'i theological works.⁴⁰ *Bushra al-karim* is a commentary on the *Muqaddimat*, which is authored by 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Karim Ba-Fadl (1446–1512) from the Hadramawt and used extensively in Shafi'i religious education in the Indian Ocean region.⁴¹ Nurudin's quote from the *Bushra al-karim* consists of one sentence in a two page piece on the ritual and is a comment on the Arabic text: "And don't break its bones"; "If the akika is performed after the child's death then it is no problem (*la ba's*) to break them." The fact that these books are Shafi'i textbooks might not be without significance because, as described above, anthropological observations suggest that the akika as funerary practice is particularly widespread in Shafi'i dominated parts of the Islamic world like the Hijaz and Indonesia.

In his other points Nurudin Shadhili repeatedly refers to Shafi'i *fiqh* books.⁴² Interestingly he agrees with his opponent's opinion on these theologians and even

⁴⁰ Ba 'Ashan, *Bushra al-karim*. "Kitab hajat al-insan fi al-Islam wal-iman" (The Book on the Needs of People in Islam and in Faith) is written by the Tanga scholar Ali bin Hemed al-Buhriy (1889–1957), and as far as I know unpublished. The treatise is written in Swahili in Arabic script, and dated 29 Rabi' I, 1344 (i.e. approximately October 17, 1925. The manuscript consists of 156 pages and contains information about ritual purity and purification (40 pages), prayers (73 pages), zakat (ten pages), fasting and vigils (ten pages), Hajj and *umra* (16 pages) and sacrifices (two pages).

⁴¹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script used in the Pesantren Milieu," *Bijdragen tot de Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990), 226–69. Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th Century Zanzibar*, 178–85.

⁴² For example "Bughya al-mustarshidin" (a collection of *fatawa* by Abd al-Rahman Ba Alawi al Haami, Mufti of the Hadramawt) and "al-Durar al-bahiyya" by Sayid Bakri Abubakar b. Uthamin (1849–1893).

quotes from Farsy's book on Shafi'i scholars.⁴³ Both Nurudin and Farsy in his earlier work have a similar approach to Islamic authority. Authoritative knowledge ultimately comes from the Qur'an and the Sunna, but can only be accessed through personal and reliable networks of scholars whose religious and intellectual pedigrees are known. At one point Nurudin accuses Farsy of quoting the anonymous book *Babu*, instead of referring to books whose authors are known. Despite Farsy's emphasis on harmonizing ritual behavior to the prophet's practice, the connection to this distant past and foreign location is still mediated by personal teacher–student links as is shown in the introduction to his Qur'an translation in which he describes the chain of (mostly East African) teachers who taught him the Jalalayn' tafsir. In his later work and especially in the publications of his student Saidi Musa (who not only responded to Nurudin's book but also reissued most of Farsy's work), we see that the absolute truth, disconnected from time and place of origin, is perceived as more important than the messenger “even if it is an inferior person” in Musa's words.

Even more than Farsy, Nurudin is rooted in local scholarly networks. His second source, Hemed al-Buhriy was a famous Tanga scholar and himself a student of the Tanga shaykh Umar b. Stambul (1854–1918) and Shaykh Abdallah Bakathir (1860–1925), who lived most of his life in Zanzibar. Together with Mzee bin Ali Muhammad (from the Comoros) and al-Amin Mazrui (Mombasa), al-Buhriy was instrumental in popularizing Islamic vernacular literature in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁴ Nurudin's paragraph on the akika is an almost verbatim quotation of al-Buhriy's book *Hajat al-Insan*, with the exception of a passage about shaving the hair of the child, which is practically non-existent in Tanzania, hence this omission from Nurudin's polemical pamphlet. His book *Ufafanuzi* is full of references to local,

⁴³ “Baadhi ya wanavyuoni wa kishafi.” Randall L. Pouwels, *The Shaf'i ulama of East Africa, ca. 1830–1970: A Hagiographic Account by Abdallah Saleh Farsy*.

⁴⁴ His book *Mafundisho ya dini ya uislamu* (1934; also published as *Mafunzo ya dini ya islam*) was one of the first Swahili Islamic textbooks. See also Mzee bin Ali Muhammad's book *Umuri Swalat al-kubra* in which he wrote about the “religious revolution” Muslims experienced when they first heard the Maulid al barazanji in Swahili in the 1920s.

Tanzanian and specially Tanga scholars. In most cases he adds details about their professional connections to particular mosques or educational institutions.

What Nurudin is doing here is localizing, contextualizing and personalizing religious textual authority. The problem with texts, according to Nurudin, is that they travel easily from place to place and become removed from the original local circumstances and authors. That is the reason the prophet sometimes forbade the writing down of things, because a particular issue was purely time- and place-bound, i.e. not fit for a translocal medium as written text.⁴⁵ What primarily matters in ritual is that the practice does not contradict the explicit rulings and sayings of the prophet. But apart from that condition, valid knowledge depends on scholarly networks and the personal acquaintance of the individual teachers who can evaluate and assess the applicability of particular texts. If you do not know the status of your teacher, a text alone will not help you. He encountered this barrier when, as a “foreigner,” he first settled in Tanga and Muslims did not immediately trust him as a scholar.⁴⁶ Throughout Nurudins book, the author casts doubt on the authorship of the *bid’a* books attributed to Farsy: according to him it is unbelievable that an eminent scholar as Farsy would be the writer. Nurudin consistently referred to him as sheikh kitabu bid-a’ (the shaykh of the *bid’a* book).

What we have seen above is the tension between movement and consolidation in the akika practice and discussions about its legal status. The performance of the akika is, on the one hand, very much a local, family affair redefining kinship ties and concluding a period of mourning after the loss of a beloved child. The bodies of the sacrificial animal as well as that of the deceased child are used as sites to construct meaning. But it is certainly not “just” a local ritual: the fact that in most Shafi’i-dominated areas of the Muslim world similar

⁴⁵ “amri hii ilikuwa ni ya wakati tuu” Nurudin, *Ufafanuzi wa Bid-a*, iii.

⁴⁶ Chanfi Ahmed, “Networks of the Shadhiliyya Yashrutiya Sufi Order in East Africa,” in Roman Loimeier and Rüdiger Seesemann (eds.), *The Global Worlds of the Swahili: Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in 19th and 20th Century East Africa*, 317–42.

akika rituals after the death of a child occur suggests an early influence of translocal Islamic ideas. The presence of a Qur'anic school teacher reciting sacred texts, burial orientations towards Mecca, and the important function of a child as a mediator between parents and God are not just the symptoms of an Islamized African ritual, but actually make it into an Islamic ritual defined both by place-specific and trans-regional influences.

The debate about the Islamic status of the ritual between two religious elite representatives of the Muslim clergy, Abdallah Saleh Farsy and Nurudin Shadhili, shows the emerging difference in attitudes towards religious authority. For Nurudin tradition passed on through religious networks remains crucial in ritual practice and he defended many rituals, arguing that "these things have been done since the time of the Messengers until now." The fact that most Shafi'i scholars do not condemn the akika as a funerary ritual is, for Nurudin, sufficient reason to accept the practice. Farsy, in the last part of his life attempts to get rid of all elements not directly sanctioned by authoritative texts and Muhammads precedence, thus paving the way for another wave of reform, as we will see in the next section.

Idd el-Hajj

Texts

The Idd el-Hajj (also known as *'id al-kabir* or *'id al-adha* in Arabic), is celebrated in the twelfth lunar month Dhul hijja, simultaneously with the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.⁴⁷ The two most important days of the pilgrimage are nine and ten Dhul hijja. On the ninth day Muslims gather on the plains of Arafat in solemn contemplation, while the rest of the global Islamic community fasts and prays. The next day, on the tenth of Dhul hijja, pilgrims throw stones at three pillars, shave their hair and

⁴⁷ For a more elaborate account see Van de Bruinhorst, "*Raise your Voices.*"

sacrifice an animal. All over the world, Muslims participate in the festive prayer (*salat*), followed by a sermon (*khutba*) and an animal sacrifice. Although the sacrifice is, from a theological point of view, recommended rather than obligatory, most Muslims perceive the ritual immolation of sheep, goats, cows and camels as significant.

For the symbolic meaning of the ritual sacrifice, most Muslims refer to the story of the prophet Ibrahim who showed his willingness to sacrifice his son, as related in Qur'an 37. God rewarded this obedience by providing a "great sacrificial substitute" (Q.37:107). Both in the Qur'an and in the theological reflections of the Idd el-Hajj, emphasis is put on the spiritual, ethical values of the animal sacrifice instead of its "magic" i.e. effectiveness. In a Zanzibar newspaper, the *faida* (benefits) of the animal sacrifice as part of the Idd el-Hajj are summarized in five points:⁴⁸

1. "Kumbukumbu Ibrahim" (remembering [the pious acts of] prophet Ibrahim.)
2. "Kujikurubisha kwa Mola" (to come closer to the Lord). The animal with its hairs, hooves and blood testify to the piety of the sacrificer on the Day of Judgement.
3. "Kusaidia wahitaji" (helping the needy). The ritual will discipline the Muslim soul to give up something valuable, to spend his money in solidarity without expecting anything in return.
4. "Starehe ya halali" (lawful entertainment). Beautiful clothes, food, drinks and joy in the local community and kinship networks.
5. "Kujifunza ucha Mungu" (learning to fear God). The writer refers to Q22:37 "It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches Allah. It is your piety that reaches Him."

Local performance and translocal debates

⁴⁸ Masoud Shani, "Utukufu wa kumi la mwanzo la mfunguo tatu," 6.

Within the Shafi'i school of law (dominant in East Africa), the Idd el-Hajj is a mosque ritual, contrary to many other Islamic communities where the ceremony is performed in the open air.⁴⁹ In most Tanga mosques, the communal prayer and the subsequent sermon are dominated by the recitations of Arabic printed manuals while the Swahili part of the speech almost never takes more than ten minutes. The third element, the sacrifice, is usually not performed within the congregational setting, but takes place near the family residence.

In Tanga, interest in animal sacrifice on the Idd el-Hajj is quite low: less than 40 per cent of all Muslim households performed a sacrifice in 2001 or 2002. Contrary to the akika ritual, almost all Muslims clearly preferred goats for the Idd sacrifice (109 goats against 27 sheep in 2002). A major reason for this choice is the taste of the meat. Several of the sheep sacrificers said they either got the sheep as a present (from a missionary society) or chose the sheep because they happened to have one.⁵⁰ The practice of the Idd celebration in Tanga was "local" in two ways: firstly it was mosque-centred; every group praying in its own mosque, and secondly, it reckoned the day of the festival as the tenth day of the Dhul hijja month according to the local lunar calendar.⁵¹

Both these local elements were replaced by a more translocal perspective in the 1990s with the rise of the Salafi-inspired Ansaar Muslim Youth Center (AMYC). The AMYC is successor to the Umoja wa Vijana wa Kiislamu Tanzania (Unity of Islamic Youth in Tanzania) and is currently headed by Salim Abdulrahim Barahyan. Just like Nurudin, Barahyan travelled a great deal in the course of his life. He

⁴⁹ Th.W. Juynboll, *Handleiding tot de kennis van de Mohammedaansche wet volgens de leer der shafi'itische school*, 110. In Tanga only the famous shaykh Ali b. Hemed al-Buhriy was able to organize a joint communal prayer at a field according to Abdin Noor Chande, *Ulamaa and Community Development in Tanzania: A Case Study of Religious Currents in East Africa* 104.

⁵⁰ It is remarkable that the majority of the sheep sacrificers were madrasa students, and perhaps more inclined to let their behaviour be influenced by "textual" Islam. One reason might be their willingness to "imitate prophet Ibrahim who slaughtered a ram."

⁵¹ On the issue of the different lunar dates see Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise your Voices," 221–50).

studied in Riyadh in the 1980s and worked for the Tanzanian embassy in Saudi Arabia. He also studied in Pakistan where he obtained a Bachelor's in Shari'ah and a Master's in Shari'ah and Law. He is one of the most influential Salafiyya leaders in Tanzania. Over the years, he has gradually moved from an exclusivist, non-participatory standpoint towards a more pragmatic, but not necessarily less radical point of view concerning participation in secular Tanzanian politics.⁵²

Barahyan's clearly Salafi-inspired ideas about what Islam should be, led him to change two particular points of the local Idd el-Hajj practice: the date and the venue. According to the AMYC, the date of the Idd el-Hajj is not dependent on the local crescent sighting, but rather is determined by the date of the actual Hajj events in Saudi Arabia: both calendars for this ritual occasion are connected. Most of the other Islamic groups in Tanga wait for a crescent sighting in East Africa or even in Tanzania before they start the new lunar month and celebrate the Idd el-Hajj on the tenth of this month. This date does not necessarily coincide with the tenth Dhul Hijja in Saudi Arabia, because of differences in visibility of the new moon. But according to Barahyan the local entity of the nation-state produced by the "unbelieving colonizers" is irrelevant in matters of religion.⁵³ By adhering to crescent sightings elsewhere in the world (not necessarily in Saudi Arabia) the AMYC celebration of the Idd is usually one and sometimes even two days earlier than that of the other groups in Tanga. This connection to another place in the world is emphasized by radio reporters who broadcast observations of the Hajj activities through the loudspeakers on the AMYC mosque, in "real time."⁵⁴ For the first time, the AMYC celebrations created a ritual translocal space in which time and space boundaries

⁵² Søren Gilsaa, "Muslim Politics in Tanzania: Muslim and National Identities before and after the Collapse of Ujamaa," unpublished PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen 2012. In 2011 Barahyan was very active in touring the mosques in Tanzania to mobilize people to take part in the hearings for a new constitution. In his booklet he produced for this occasion, he clarifies 13 different points in which the current 1977 Tanzanian constitution runs counter to the universalistic applicable Qur'an and sunna.

⁵³ See the AMYC bulletin, *Al-fikrul Islami* nr. 50, 1.

⁵⁴ This is possible because Tanzania and Saudi Arabia are in the same timezone.

collapsed.⁵⁵ In most of his Idd el-Hajj sermons, Barahyan emphasizes this translocal connection between the Idd ceremonies in Tanga and what happens on that same day in another place: Mecca.⁵⁶

In line with this stress on translocal and transnational Islam, in 1997 Barahyan introduced Idd prayers on the centrally positioned Tangamano field. The animal sacrifices that used to take place in a domestic setting, were now publicly displayed in the center of the town. This new, translocal character of the Idd was illustrated by the presence of large banners displaying the names of the international organizations that had donated the money for the animals. The new practice was introduced by the AMYC director not based on particular texts, but as following the prophetic example many centuries ago in a different geographical place:

My brothers, we have some important announcements, so please listen. I think the custom to distribute coupons (*kugawa kuponi*) with regard to the sacrificial sadaka [is one thing you are used to]. Another thing is the accomplishment of the *sunna* of the Prophet ... yes we will slaughter today here some animals, in order to allow (*ili iwe ndiyo ruksa*) the other Muslims to go home and slaughter an animal in their own houses (*mayumbani kwao*). The *salat* ... the sacrificial ceremony is done immediately after the sermon and therefore today we will accomplish [that] here [and now]. Some animals will be slaughtered here and that is a *sunna* received from the Prophet when he was in Medina; he used to slaughter some animals on the prayer field (*uwanja wa sala*). Afterwards he let the Muslims go home to slaughter in their own houses. Therefore today some animals are brought here in order to finish this ceremony successfully. And [according] to this ceremony my Muslim brothers, it is required that those who are able and have animals, let them slaughter, eat, and distribute among their brothers in Islam.

In a different sermon the same year Barahyan comments on Q. 108:2 "Therefore to thy Lord turn in Prayer and Sacrifice":

⁵⁵ Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, 15.

⁵⁶ See one of his fully transcribed Idd el-Hajj sermons in Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise your Voices," 456–72.

The legal rules of sacrifices prescribe that one of its conditions is that the animal must be slaughtered immediately after the Idd prayers and praise be to God we have indeed (*kimatendo*) done that this time (*safari hii*).⁵⁷

The open-air ritual sacrifice is not only explained as a prophetic *sunna* in Medina but also as a joining of “all the Muslims, especially those who celebrate the hajj right now.” This sentence identifies the transformation of a local Idd celebration into a more translocal manifestation of the global Islamic community. This image was apparently also attractive for Muslims who do not agree with every aspect of the Salafi doctrines. For example, the Sufi brotherhood Qadiriyya, usually one of the public opponents of the Salafi groups, issued a fatwa in 1998 announcing that the local Idd el Hajj should be performed on the same day as it occurred in Mecca.⁵⁸ Also, the rising numbers of participants in the public prayers in Tanga after 1997 showed the increasing appeal of being part of translocal Muslim communities. Since the 1990s, coinciding with the introduction of multi-party politics and a relaxing of the rigid state/mosque relationship on the mainland, several other Muslim groups also started to celebrate their Idd in the public sphere, for example those related to the Islamic Propagation Center and the Ahmadiyya. Despite their different political agenda’s these groups have a shared desire to spread Islam outside the mosque. The symbolic action of holding Idd prayers outside and on the same date as their brothers and sisters who are performing the hajj, reveals their desire to transcend local, parochial conditions and participate in a more global community.

At this point it is instructive to briefly return to Shaykh Nurudin Shadhili and his opinion about localities. Approaching Islam through a Shafi’i interpretative tradition as Nurudin does, is not to suggest that he ignores the translocal, universal

⁵⁷ Taped sermon, “Kuchinja,” September 6, 1997, side B.

⁵⁸ Muhammad Nassor Abdulla el-Qadiry, *Kitabu Arafā: nguzo kubwa ya hijja ni Arafā tarehe tisa mfunjo tatu na kuswali Idd el-Hajj sawa na Makka*.

claims of Islam, but it allows for differences in interpretation between places. This becomes clear in Nurudins perspective on the moon sighting issue in Ramadan and the Hajj month. He was one of the keynote speakers in the May 1991 Zanzibar EACROTANAL conference on several religious disputes, including the problem of the beginning of the new lunar month for ritual occasions. The groups advocating a global, translocal international moon sighting as valid for the whole world (such as the AMYC) were accused by others of not being true to their word: in fact they just followed Saudi Arabia, another “place.” In his lecture Nurudin provided evidence that there is no hierarchy in localities in Islam. To prove his point he read and translate a complete fatwa signed by the Saudi scholar Ibn Baz in Mecca. In his speech, Nurudin vented his anger that imam Shafi‘i is treated as a small boy (*mtoto mdogo*). There is no dichotomy between local, Shafi‘i Islam, and translocal Salafi Islam: rather, all these legal traditions developed in different localities are complementary to each other.⁵⁹ Instead of just quoting the Qur’an and sunna, Muslims should not forget that other legal heuristic tools like *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) and *ijma’* (consensus) are also valid instruments for finding guidelines for proper (ritual) behaviour.

The body as a medium

Arguably the most important contribution to the religious discourse in Tanga in recent decades, are the reading classes conducted by Salim Abdul Rahim Barahyan. In these classes he reads and explains classic Islamic books in their entirety. All of these classes are recorded, and some of these tapes, DVD’s and VCD’s are sold in the

⁵⁹ The argument that Muslim reformers were claiming they were following the universal truth, not restricted to schools of law or local circumstances, but were just entering another *madhhab*, is very well represented by Abdillahi Nassir: Kai Kresse, “The Uses of History: Rhetorics of Muslim Unity and Difference on the Kenyan Swahili Coast,” in Ed Simpson and Kai Krese (eds.) *Struggling with History. Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, 235–38.

streets. During my fieldwork he was halfway through the “Riyad al-salihin” (the Gardens of the Righteous), a compilation of Qur’an verses and *ahâdîth* (prophetic traditions) written by Abu Zakaria Mohyuddin Yahya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (1233–1277). In 1997, the year when Barahyan started holding public Idd prayers on the Tangamano field, he was working his way through “Umdat al-ahkam min kalam khayr al-anam” [Reliance of the Rulings from the Words of the Best of Mankind] by Abu Muhammad ʿAbd al-Ghani b. ʿAbd al Wahid al-Maqdisi al-Jamma’ili (1146–1203). The author is a Hanbali scholar and the work is structured according to Hanbali *fiqh*, a school of law often associated in East Africa with the Salafiyya. Different from the pragmatic works that dominated the discussion about the akika sacrifice, both the “Riyad al-Salihin” and the ʿUmdat only contain *ahâdîth*: cases and anecdotes from the time of the Prophet.

Unlike Nurudin, who emphasized in particular traditions of learning and scholarly networks as pathways and media through which authentic knowledge was passed on from Muhammad to this day and age, Barahyan attempted to connect to Muhammad’s example directly, without the obscuring private opinions of other scholars. His lectures are full of the expression “kama alivyobainisha /alivyofundisha Mtume” (just like the Messenger has explained/taught), an expression very similar to one encountered in Farsys discourse condemning the local akika practice. How this way of reading texts influenced actual behaviour was illustrated in April 1997 when Barahyan first started to publicly perform a sacrifice. That year he killed a black and white sheep while several men immobilized the animal. The video footage reveals the lack of expertise and shows how his notes drop into the spurting blood. A few months later in September 1997 he discussed *hadîth* nr 388 in the ʿUmdat, the only tradition in that book dealing with the sacrifice as part of the Idd el-Hajj:

The Prophet slaughtered two horned rams, black and white in color (as sacrifices), and I saw him putting his foot on their sides and mentioning Allah's Name and Takbir (Allahu Akbar). Then he slaughtered them with his own hands.⁶⁰

In his mosque lecture, apparently Barahyan had in mind his own sacrificial experience a few months earlier that year. His oral explanations of the text no longer reflect cognition only, but it shows how embodied this knowledge has become in his lengthy explanation:

“[Muhammad] put one of his feet on the body of that animal, and here ... it is explained that the purpose is to put down the animal on its left side facing the qibla [prayer direction] and one of his feet was on the neck and then he passed the knife. I think, which foot would be the easiest to use? If he would place his right foot [on the neck of the animal], it would be difficult to slaughter, because he uses his right hand for the knife and this will leave him no space ... the purpose of placing the foot [on the animal] is to make it stop trembling and shaking and so preventing the person to slaughter it.”

The 1999 video shows a much better prepared Barahyan: his wide flowing clothes are carefully tucked away and he does not wear sandals as in 1997. All five animals that year are killed by Barahyan himself. Someone who wants to assist him in immobilizing the animals is waved away, and Barahyan attempts to use his right foot on the body of the animal to restrain it, in exactly the way he understood Muhammad to have carried out sacrifices. However, this was very impractical and the animals probably too strong, so in 2002 he abandoned this practice and only killed one animal, which was held by someone else. All other animals are killed by a man apparently very accustomed to this work.

Barahyans behavior reveals a personal willingness to follow, to imitate in the most literal way the example of the prophet. In his lecture he says: “this religion doesn’t need any personal opinion (*rai*) about anything, if we have an established

⁶⁰ Some editions of the “Umdat” refer to another report which reads “mubasharatan bila tawkil” (immediately, without a proxy or representative).

practice of the Prophet.”⁶¹ His favoured text in these sacrifice sermons is Q 6:162: “Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds.” When explaining this almost mystical attitude, he often uses loanwords like Twaa (from the Arabic *ta’a*, obedience) and “*kusarenda kikamilifu*” (total surrender). His emphasis on the importance of this bodily (*kiwiliwili*) submission in Islam, seems to be influenced by his earlier experience of animal sacrifice. In the analysis of Islamic ritual transformations, it is this bodily experience, this acting out of religious texts exactly as described in the texts, that should be taken into account.

Conclusion: translocality, texts and bodies

Translocality

The tensions created by global transformative forces as mentioned in the introduction has had very uneven effects on the two rituals described here. In the case of the akika, little change seems to have occurred between Landbergs observations of the ritual at the end of the 1960s and the descriptions my Digo interlocutors gave more than three decades later. Attempts by reformists to discard the akika as a funerary ritual apparently have had few tangible results. I will present a couple of preliminary explanations drawing on the data provided above.

In the first place the akika can best be understood as a local phenomenon but it is certainly not just a very particular local ethnographic case. There is clearly an (unexplored) historical link with the transregional tradition of the Shafi’i school of law. Traveling scholars in the Indian Ocean region must have been aware of the akika as a funerary practice in other parts of the Muslim world such as the Hijaz and

⁶¹ Tape “Kuchinja,” side A.

Indonesia and it is more than likely that translocal ideas about this ritual influenced the performance and significance in different areas. Translocality as “an intermediary concept which helps to better understand and conceptualize connections beyond the local which are, however, neither necessarily global in scale nor necessarily connected to global moments,”⁶² could be a useful starting point for further research.

A second field of (yet unmapped) research that might shed light on the transformation of the akika ritual is the changing child mortality rate in (rural Tanzania). Despite the rapidly decreasing number of children dying before their fifth year (from 155 deaths per 1000 born in 1995, to 76 in 2010), during the time of research it was still very high. That raises the question of whether the funerary akika will no longer be performed if child mortality drops further? Thirdly, the data suggest a difference between rural and urban practices. It is likely that in towns the exposure to global forces and the pace of developments is much faster and consequently will result in a decrease in the funerary practice in urban areas.

In the case of the Idd el-Hajj we have seen much more change over the last decades, and it has also become more clearly linked to global forces. From a local mosque-centered ritual with invisible sacrifices, the ceremony now has a much more translocal outlook. The open-air prayers and sacrifice as well as the synchronizing of the ritual calendar with the Saudi calendar show an increased awareness of being part of a global Islamic community. However, this was certainly not just the effect of newly discovered texts. The fact that this happened in an era of a retreating state, multiparty politics, liberalization and an increase in Muslim media (especially radio and newspapers) might explain why this idea spread easily to other Muslim groups. Against a discourse of marginalization and general dissatisfaction with the Tanzanian state, the global Umma is an increasingly attractive alternative to the nation-state. While most current scholarly literature emphasizes political and

⁶² Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, 3.

economic global factors as driving these changes in Islamic practice, this chapter provides ample evidence that these transformations are also mediated through the reading of texts and the embodied experience of authoritative religious experts.

Translocal texts

In attempts to transform the two rituals, Muslim reformers refer to the original practice of Muhammad. But we see variations in the ways scholars connect to the past and make it speak to different local circumstances. The difference between the approach of reformers like Farsy and Barahyan and “traditionalists” like Nurudin and al-Buhriy, is not in an emphasis on textual knowledge. All of them extensively quote Islamic texts and invoke textual authority and, ultimately, all of them want to harmonize behaviour in accordance with the Prophet’s practice. Nurudin and al-Buhriy very much value the historically grown, Shafi’i interpretative tradition, and even early reformers like Farsy still appreciate the transmission of knowledge via a chain of authoritative teachers. In the case of Barahyan, we see an attempt to approach Muhammad’s example unmediated by any interpretation of other scholars. But instead of getting rid of the “localized” tradition of the traditionalists, Nurudin showed that these “new” Salafi groups are just swapping one local tradition for another local one and do not have access to a pure, translocal, universal Islam.

Local bodies

Even if texts are used and interpreted, influence on the actual religious practice is far from predictable. One important factor in this process is the human body, as anthropologists studying non-Muslim and Muslim rituals have shown.⁶³ The *akika* is very much connected to the personal, physical body and experiences like mourning,

⁶³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Michael Lambek, *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery, and Spirit Possession*.

sexuality, gender and the human lifecycle. The body of the sacrificial animal is imbued with heavy semantic layers, expressing transcendent hopes of the living. In contrast to adult funerals where the dead are dependent on the living,⁶⁴ the deceased child offers an opportunity to secure a place in the afterworld for her or his parents. As has become clear, just the change of the species from a sheep to a goat results in a completely different ritual. The fact that the akika uses the (gendered) body as a basic template for the construction of meaning, might make it harder to change.⁶⁵

In a different way the body is present in the Idd el-Hajj. What becomes clear in the case of Barahyan's sacrificial praxis is that Islamic ritual is not just based on cognitions and texts: it is also embodied. Barahyan's willingness to submit his behaviour to the authority of texts led him to experiment with animal sacrifice. When some of the elements turned out to be challenging (i.e. restraining an animal with one foot while at the same time killing it in the proper manner) he pragmatically changed his method. Here we see bodily experience as a medium for reinterpreting and understanding texts. By *doing* what Muhammad did, a Muslim will *understand* what God's message is for humankind.

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⁶⁴ Becker, "Islamic Reform."

⁶⁵ M.E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice*.

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